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A FEW REMARKS

ABOUT

SICK CHILDREN IN NEW YORK,

AND THE

NECESSITY OF A HOSPITAL

FOR THEM.

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BY PHILOPEDOS,

An Ex-Dispensary Doctor.  
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NEW YORK:

WM. C. BRYANT & CO, PRINTERS, 18 NASSAU STREET.

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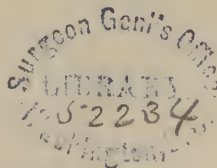
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The population of the city of New York in the year 1850, was 515,392, and the number of deaths was *one* in *thirty-three*. The same census gives *one* in *sixty-seven* as the proportion of the deaths to the living population in the other parts of the State. This difference in the rate of mortality, in the city and country, appears to indicate the prevalence of more health, and a far better prospect of longevity among the inhabitants of the rural parts of the State ; and the difference between the two is a matter of surprise, and, by many, can scarcely be credited. It is, however, perfectly accurate, and, so far as the city is concerned, receives its corroboration from the report of the City Inspector for that year. This document informs us that there were 15,377 deaths during that period, which is 1 in 33,52. It also supplies another species of information of considerable importance, in explanation of the difference, and which can be obtained by referring to the table containing the *ages* of the deceased. It will there be seen that 8,052, or 61 per cent. of these deaths, were children under the age of ten years. In the year 1851 there were 22,024 deaths reported ; of which number 11,856, or 54 per cent., were children at the same ages. During the seven weeks of the present year (1852) ending on the 28th of August, there were reported 3,712 deaths, of which number there were 2,480, or 66. 81 per cent. children under the age of ten years. On examining also these records for a number of years past, the fact of the immense mortality among them, is one of the most prominent there mentioned ; 49 per cent. being the average number for a period of sixteen years. It is evident, therefore, that the excess in the number of deaths for the city, is made up exclusively of young children, to an extent that is truly alarming.

Not only is this mortality excessive, but it appears also to have been upon the increase. This will appear, by comparing the number of deaths with the population at the different census periods ; thus, in 1835, the deaths were as 1 in 46. 87 ; in 1840, 1 in 39. 74 ; in 1845, 1 in 37. 55, and in 1850, 1 in 33. 52.

The causes of this fatality among the younger portion of the population, must be referred to the peculiar condition in which people live in cities, acting especially upon such as are most liable to receive physical impressions. This condition is that of crowding a vast number of people in comparatively a small space, and the effect is the deterioration of the air that they breathe.

The change thus produced is effected both by the consumption of the oxygen by respiration, and by the emanations from the bodies of the living ; both imparting a poisonous influence to confined and badly ventilated residences.

The first-mentioned change is a chemical one, and consists of depriving the air, by breathing, of its life-imparting constituents, and leaving in its place carbonic acid gas and nitrogen, both *poisons* when taken into the lungs. The other alteration is an admixture with the air of the emanations which arise from the bodies of the healthy and diseased. These emanations escape with the insensible perspiration. In a state of health there is nothing peculiar in this fluid, except that it possesses a slight animal odor ; but when collected and kept close in a warm place, it becomes excessively offensive. The perspiration, in disease, has various odors, and even colors, as red, saffron, black or blue ; all of which shows that it is a process of *depuration* or cleansing ; and that to the extent of twenty-eight ounces in twenty-four hours. It cannot, therefore, be otherwise than injurious to be breathing an atmosphere laden with substances thrown from the body because they are injurious, and not proper to be retained ; thus another *poison* is taken into the system by breathing close and contaminated air. Is it any wonder that children, who require every thing they receive into the body to be of the purest quality, should be the greatest sufferers in excessively crowded habitations ?

In a city like ours, the air, in over-crowded houses, must, from these causes, become exceedingly impure. In summer, such a state of living becomes almost insupportable, and in some of the poorer parts, the doors, windows and steps may be seen in the evening crowded with people endeavoring instinctively to obtain a little fresh air.

As was just remarked, children suffer most from this crowded mode of living, and it is the children of the extremely poor that die in such frightful numbers and swell so enormously our city bills of mortality.

Many persons are ignorant of the large number of people that are in one house among the poor. The average number in an ordinary sized house is about fifty ; and it is by no means unusual to find six permanent occupants of one room, and it is known to have reached the number of twenty.

All this is bad enough where the houses stand side by side fronting the

street with some space in the rear ; but it is inconceivably worse where every available spot of ground is occupied by some kind of building, and where double or treble the proper number are crowded together with barely space enough among them to reach the different entrances.

There are places known as courts where the lot of ground is built on three sides—that fronting the street being left open. The air in these places cannot be otherwise than confined and consequently impure ; but it cannot be compared with that which is found in other places, where every inch of ground of what was formerly the yard has been successively built upon, leaving hardly a breathing spot, with the exception of the alley used in common, and which opens into the street.

There are others which, although built more systematically, are equally bad for ventilation. These houses are erected on the front, rear, and ends of several lots, leaving a yard in common in the form of a parallelogram with a group of out houses in the centre ; the entrance to this yard, by which access is had to the rear buildings, is through an arched way in the front row.

When you have fairly entered, you observe that the houses in both rows face inwards, while the front row also faces the street. The rear row will probably be built against a similar row, so that ventilation by means of opposite windows is impossible. They are so small as not to allow of stairs on the inside, but the ascent is made by means of stairs from the outside leading to a gallery passing in front of each story. Each room has the number over the door and opens on the gallery, and there being no other opening except a small window at the side of the door, the air can only be changed by its ascending the chimney. In a hot summer's night these rooms are unendurably stifling. I have been in a court like this in the afternoon of a hot day, and have stationed myself in the upper gallery to take a view of the scene below. The whole yard literally swarmed with children of every age, and numbers of people were crowded at the doors and windows of the row before me to obtain the benefit of what little fresh air there could be found in such a place. No ordinary wind that blows could ever reach the enclosure, but dead stagnation reigns from month to month without any mitigation. The confused hum peculiar to a large assemblage of people proved how vast were the numbers confined in the place.

In some places like this, hogs and cows are kept, and the moisture from the whole enclosure is offensive at all times ; but in rainy weather it is unfit even for hogs to live in. Sometimes the yard is rendered, by the filth and moisture, almost impassable, and has been covered over with boards, preventing any evaporation, while every tread presses up a green, offensive, muddy fluid between the boards.

There are numerous confined places known by the general name of courts; this, however, will suffice to give an idea of the nature of such places, their common condition being that of an absence of a sufficiency of air for the requirements of the body, rendering the inhabitants predisposed to the action of pestilential influences in their most malignant form, when pestilential diseases prevail.

A more particular sketch, however, may be necessary to give the reader some idea of the needs of those who suffer most in such habitations, and for whom all must feel some interest.

Go with me, therefore, kind reader, on a visit to some of my dispensary patients. The scenes will of necessity be for you but the pictures of the imagination; for me they will be the strong reminiscences of the truthful scenes of years now long past.

Here is my memorandum. In addition to the name and number of the street, it has this observation, "*Chd. 3 f. f.*," which, translated into English, means "child, 3d floor, front." Here it is: an old house, the "*3 f. f.*," proves to be the upper floor of the building, next to the roof. There is no plastering, and the sun's rays streaming upon it, produces a great intensity of heat, which rarifies the air beneath it, while from the construction of the house, and from its situation, closely surrounded by others, there can be no direct passage of air from without; what little arrives, there comes through the midst of a score or two of people below. Both these causes so affect the air as to make it impossible to receive at each inspiration a sufficiency of oxygen to satisfy the hungry lungs; we feel that we are on an allowance, and are suffering lassitude and even faintness, and that if such a state of prostration should continue, we could not retain vital energy enough to resist the invasion of disease.

There are three little people sweltering in this air, for whom I am expected to prescribe. To direct any kind of medicine to be given to them is positively absurd; it is disheartening to visit such a place, and to be required to relieve physical suffering when the first and indispensable pabulum of life is wanting. We must leave them for the present, and endeavor, before our next visit, to devise something that, professionally speaking, "will fulfil the indication."

Let us change the scene from the heat of our tropical summer to the intensity of our winter's cold. "*3 r. row b.*," which means "3d house, rotten row-basement." Every city has its "rotten row," and doubtless dozens of them. It is a favorite term, and a highly expressive one. The one I now refer to, stood—if that term is a suitable one—precisely where the building of the Northern Dispensary now stands. It was a row of very old houses which cannot be better described than it is by the name that was given to it.



When it rained hard, the cellars were overflowed with water. The numerous crevices and openings caused but little difference in the winter's temperature outside or inside of some inhabited parts of "Rotton Row." One of these is the cellar which we are now to visit. There, upon a pile of shavings gathered for fuel, portions of which adhere in hard frozen lumps, lies the mother of the child I am to prescribe for. She is dead drunk. One of the children is clambering over the mother, making vain attempts to awake her. The sick child, a neighbor informs me, has been taken into temporary charge by her, as it appeared to be perishing with cold. The natural instinct to render assistance to the helpless, or perhaps the exercise of the Christian principal of benevolence, has been exerted to relieve this little child from present suffering.

I have often met with self-sacrifice and instances of kindness towards the sick and destitute, on the part of those no less destitute than the objects of their solicitude; watching and nursing them at every interval that could be spared from the duties required in their own families: while it must be admitted that many instances, also of brutal selfishness are exhibited—the direct effects of poverty, ignorance and degradation. Human nature, however, is the same in every class, and if selfishness is presented to us with rough moroseness, that shocks the sensitive mind by one class, it is at least no worse in its effects than when influenced by the conventional usages of more refined life. Selfishness, wherever found, can produce no other effects than unhappiness. If mercy, in the language of the immortal poet

"Is twice blessed;  
Blessing him that gives, and him that takes,"

So may selfishness, that scarce can brook another's wish, have its twofold curse; but worse, far worse for him who suffers it to blight the germs of kindness in his heart, than for him who is left by it in neglect—perchance in sorrow and in suffering.

Let us visit "Rotten Row" in summer. We will enter again one of these dilapidated cellars. Why, the floor is covered with water! True, it rained hard last night, and these places are generally so after a hard rain: the water is only about half an inch in depth, and you observe that bricks are placed at convenient distances for stepping to the bedside, that the feet may not get wet. It is of very little importance to know what form of disease it is that we see in the bed, or what description of person lies prostrated by it; whether the robust man or feeble woman—the aged, whose day is rapidly closing, or the young child, whose morning has but just dawned—all present a hopeless task for him who would relieve them by the resources of the medical art.

I once knew a pool of water, that was in an area, burst through the foundation of a house, and empty itself into a room where people were sleeping, carrying with it a quantity of mud and sand ; it is even said that some have in this way been drowned. Besides the heavy rains that overflow these places, the water not unfrequently gets into them by the tide rising, and people living in them have barely escaped with their lives. In one instance, on the extraordinary rise of the tide in a cellar in Washington street, it disturbed *thirteen* people, four adults, and nine children, during their sleep.\*

With or without excessive rains or unusually high tides, these places are always damp, and are thereby a continued source of various inflammatory diseases, rendered more complicated and unmanageable by the positive deterioration of the air from want of ventilation ; indeed, the occupants of cellars are always sick in a never-ending rotation. Sickness among the poor is always great, and in these damp and badly-ventilated places is more protracted, besides being more fatal, especially among children, than above ground. More than two-thirds suffer some lingering disease, existing among such as are almost constantly exposed to the causes that are always in action in such places, as women and children. They pass most of their time, both day and night, in the confined air of their abodes, while the men pass the day at their usual out-door work, and are under "*home influences*" only at night. In many of these places the floors are rotten, and impart an odor peculiar to decaying wood, while the whole has a chilly feeling, and yields a damp earthly odor, strongly suggestive of the odor of a vault. It cannot, therefore, be a subject for wonder that, in proportion to the number of inhabitants, the demands for medical services should be much more numerous by the inhabitants of cellars than by others.†

Another memorandum indicates that I have been desired to call at No. — — — street, "*ch'd. f. b.*," which means "child, front basement." Here is the house. The door is locked. Knock. No response. Knock again. Still no notice is taken of us ; it is evident that we can not gain admittance. We will not go away yet. I have had some experience in these matters before. Sick people are not in the habit of being removed

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\* "One cellar was reported by the police to be occupied as a sleeping apartment by 39 persons ! In another the tide had risen so high that it was necessary to approach the bedside of a patient by means of a plank, which was laid from one stool to another ; while the dead body of an infant was actually *sailing* about the room in its coffin !" — (*Official Report on the Cholera in Boston, 1849.*)

† The number of persons inhabiting cellars in the city of New York, who have no other room, according to a census taken by the Chief of the Police in March, 1850, was 18,456.



when the doctor is sent for. Yonder is a little window through which we may look, and perhaps learn something of the state of things within, and of the reason wherefore we could not be admitted. Let us look into the apartment. Every thing is rather obscure, but as the eye becomes accustomed to the gloom, objects gradually appear with more distinctness. There are evidently two children in that room; one lying on a bed, and the other sitting on the floor amusing itself with some uncouth playthings. Now the condition of things is better understood. The mother has left these children alone, while she has gone to earn a trifle by a day's work. This is the reason also that a request, of which I took no memorandum, was left that I would call at a designated hour, at which time she doubtless left her work, and went home to see her little ones and meet the doctor. My engagements not permitting me to call at the time desired, she had again locked them in and had gone to finish her day's work. We can see things in the room a little more clearly; the little one on the bed has a highly flushed cheek, and is, no doubt, burning with fever, while there is no one—nor will there be for many hours—even to give it a drink of water. God help you, my poor little creature, in your loneliness and suffering!

Still another memorandum to visit a cellar. This one is in a rear building. The house is one of those that has been built on the rear of a lot of ground, even after it would appear that every spot on it had already its house. It is completely hemmed in, and as we descend, observe how extremely dark it is. In addition to the want of ventilation so common to all such places, there is a remarkable absence of light. From the position of the room the rays of the sun have never reached it, and it appears doomed to uninterrupted murkiness and gloom. Notice the inmates, how pale they are! what a waxen, cadaverous complexion these children have! the very lips are pale and the whole face is puffy and destitute of expression. The father and one child died about a month since, and the entire family appear to have been always sick.

It may appear strange to some readers to assert that the absence of light has had something to do with all this; it is at least an important ingredient in the subterranean death-mixture. I have known some positive effects of the mere absence of light in the gloomy apartment of the hypochondriac, and abundantly proved to be from that cause. I have read how light—the sun's glorious light—was regarded as an emanation from a god; and Phœbus Apollo was worshipped as the dispenser of health and happiness. The fable of Apollo slaying the serpent Python, is but an allegorical description of the scattering of the noxious vapours that arose after a flood, by the sun's rays. I remember also reading that it was a practice among some of the old Romans, to denude themselves and bathe

in the solar light on the house-top ; or, as Pliny says, to take a *solaria*, or solar air-bath.

Light, plenty of it, appears to exercise a great influence over the physiological condition of all living things, in the production of greater vigor. The effects are visible to us in the blanching and feebleness of vegetable sprouts that have grown in the dark—in the contrast between the upper and under parts of fishes, particularly such as swim close to the bottom ; the under being white and the upper part brown. So with the fur of quadrupeds, that which covers the under portions of the body is of a more delicate texture and of a whiter color than the rest, where it is constantly exposed to light. In some of the polar animals, the entire coat changes to a white during the long night of winter. I have also read that travellers refer to the long days of a Norwegian summer the unusual amount of vigor they experience during that season. Physicians also tell us that sick people in the dark portions of the wards of an hospital are likely to remain longer sick than such as are more favorably situated with regard to light—that miners who pass a large portion of their time in the dark chambers of the earth, suffer more from the absence of light and have more sickness than is likely to arise from mere absence of ventilation alone, and that the children of miners and also of such as inhabit dark courts and cellars, are apt to be deformed and ailing. I have myself observed that the young inmates of cellars are languid and feeble, with the circulation slow, the skin cool and pale, and of a reptile feel.

Go with me now, after the lapse of a fortnight, to the New York Hospital, whither these children with their mother were sent. I must repeat the remark that this is no picture drawn by the imagination, but a simple truth. They begin to look as children should look. The first tinges of the ruddy hue of health have already appeared. They are cheerful and playful. What has brought about all this change ? Not a particle of medicine has been given, but they have been placed in a large, light, and well-ventilated ward, while they have been supplied with ordinary healthy nourishment.

1 We may form an idea from this sketch of the causes of some of the sufferings of the poor, and learn also that those who have the least to do with the production of these causes and with any arrangement necessary for their physical comfort—such as can have no thought whatever upon the subject—are the principal victims.

It is certainly a remarkable fact, that those who could have had no agency whatever in causing the evils they suffer, should be among those that are first and the most grievously punished. We have, however, nothing to do with this as a subject for discussion, but can only consider

the facts as they are presented to us, and to observe the action of their causes, that the knowledge thus acquired may be available for the prevention and removal of the physical evils to which our race is continually exposed. It may not, however, be out of place to remark that the laws controlling our physical are as imperative as those which govern our moral condition, with this difference, that the latter takes cognizance of our individual will, and as individuals we are liable to be punished for voluntary disobedience. In the former the penalty reaches us whether the transgressions are voluntary or not; the physical penalty following a violation of the physical law with more unremitting certainty than chastening punishment follows a violation of the moral law. The deprivation of necessary food or air, or any other violation of the law in question no sooner exists, than a certain penalty begins and affects all within the reach of the law. When we see therefore the utterly helpless suffering from these causes, the responsibility becomes the greater on the part of those who have it in their power to interfere for their relief. If the infliction of these sufferings is independent of their agency, so is also their relief. Others must come to their assistance, and, as far as it is in their power, modify or change the circumstances which are continually in action to produce a certain result.

Among the most prominent of the violations of these laws is excessive crowding in all cities. It is an evil never to be removed, but may be much modified and controlled. It has been remedied to a certain extent by providing, during the existence of severe pestilences, retreats for the poor that are in health and hospitals for such as are sick. The sick children of the poor are so numerous—and with almost a never-ending pestilence among them—that it is proposed to establish a permanent hospital as one of the necessary measures for their relief.

For the children of the poor abundant provision is made for the peculiar wants attendant upon their condition in life. The juvenile criminal is sought that he may be reclaimed ere the habit of vice shall render him incapable of moral renovation. Schools are freely opened for the reception of all children, and in such numbers that no one, however poor, need grow up to adult age ignorant of the rudiments of knowledge; and instruction, extending even to literary and scientific accomplishment, is offered to all. Asylums for the utterly destitute offer their protection to multitudes of the helpless offspring of the city pauper, while thousands of parentless children are tenderly carried through that period of life when their very ignorance of a parent's care adds a touching interest to their claims for nurture, for protection and for guidance. Under all circumstances of ordinary destitution is the child cared for by some special method adapted to his needs, with the single exception of sickness.

No assylum exclusively devoted to his reception when sick exists in our city, and for want of such how many and how multiform are the instances of suffering in our large population, no one can surmise. The instances above cited are but isolated cases, and can scarcely be regarded as anything more than types of a few forms of destitution in sickness.

It must be evident to all who will reflect upon the large amount of sickness there is among the children of the poor in our city, that hospital accommodations for them are among its most urgent wants. In the dwellings of the very poor there is almost always more or less absence of everything necessary for the ordinary relief of the sick, and especially of the unremitting attention that is needed by them. The necessity of constant occupation to obtain the means of existence, precludes the possibility, in a large number of instances, of devoting any time to the requirements of the sick; and it is from this want of attendance, next to want of pure air, that children suffer most. Often too, all the care and watchfulness bestowed may be rendered useless by the absence of the most necessary accommodations. This may be tolerated during health, but in sickness it is not only distressing, but positively injurious. For those who have the necessary comforts for the sick, or who have time that they may bestow upon their families, when they most require it, dispensary attendance is sufficient for their wants in sickness; but when it is known that many children are absolutely destitute of all these—indispensable as they are—the necessity of providing well-ventilated accommodations is evident; a place where all the wants of the sick may be supplied, and especially when personal care must form an essential part of the arrangement:—a need only to be supplied by the establishment of a well-organized hospital.

If it is thought by any that such children as may require removal from their homes could be accommodated in the hospitals already established, it will be necessary to state that there are not hospitals enough for the ordinary wants of our city, now containing more than half a million of inhabitants. Among so large a number of people, many more hospitals than now exist could be filled with distinct classes, either of people or of diseases. Where sickness among children exceeds to so great a degree sickness among adults, as it is found to do in New York, there will always be a sufficient number of applicants to fill any number of hospitals that will be established for their exclusive use.

The need, also, of a special hospital for children, is evident when it is considered that a large number is to be provided for, and that there should be an adaptation to the wants of a particular class of patients, who require a peculiar mode of management, and attendants *adapted* exclusively to them.



Some of the principal cities of Europe have, for a number of years, had hospitals organized exclusively for children; increased experience has proved their importance, and led to their establishment more recently in many others; so that, at the present time, most of the larger cities have hospitals expressly devoted to this class of patients.

There can not be found a city in the world where a similar establishment is needed more than in the city of New York. For to the great number of permanent poor residents always in a city, there is to be added the peculiarity of an enormous transient population. The children of the latter suffer when sick, in addition to the ordinary privations, all the distressing evils of miserable, filthy lodgings, and of other temporary accommodations.

After a careful consideration of the truths here presented, surely no one can hesitate to do what is in his power to assist in the establishment and support of a Child's Hospital in New York.

In suggesting the title of "ST. NICHOLAS' HOSPITAL" for the proposed institution, the writer is more influenced by its appropriateness than by any attachment to the name, which, in a native of New York, might be pardoned—blended as is this name with many pleasant reminiscences.

Strange stories have been related to us in childhood of midnight visits at the Holy Season; and a poet of our own—*Tam eruditione claro, quam virtute venerando*—has sung to us of one of these visits, and told us of tiny reindeer steeds with their tiny wain that bore gifts, kind gifts of affection, during the hours of slumber. These stories are not the fragments of an imaginary fairy tale, nor the distortion of some pagan superstitious rite; nor are the gifts the doings of wicked witchcraft: at such a time

"No fairy takes, nor witch hath power to charm,  
So hallowed and so gracious is the time."

Although a departure from the simplicity of truth, the legend is of Christian origin, and came from the workings of Christian benevolence. The benevolent character of the pious Bishop of Myra shewed itself mostly in his tender care for children, and the traditionary history of his affection for the young still lingers among us in the secret and mysterious gifts of "Sint Nicholaas goed heilig man."















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